

# Health and safety statistics: what do they tell us?



Statistics might seem irrelevant, but they can help highlight how well we do things and how to learn from our mistakes, says **Andrew Mills**, chairman of the Guernsey Occupational Safety & Health Association

WHEN people think of health and safety statistics, there is a tendency to think: how does that affect me? Am I bothered? I'm OK and have never had a problem, so they are not relevant to me?

But I'd contend they are relevant to everyone. They are a measure of how caring we are as a society, of how well we do things. Do we act sensibly, do we do things well, what can we learn from mistakes – it's a fact that most accidents and ill-health caused by work should have been easily avoided. Are our staff trained well? Do they have the right protective equipment? Do they know how to do things properly and what to do when something goes wrong? There really are many things we can learn from statistics.

An accident or illness at work costs – loss of a good employee, the costs of finding a replacement, the costs of lost time (often huge costs to the management of a business), the costs of negative publicity and a damaged reputation, the costs of delayed or cancelled work, the costs of compensation, the costs of investigation, legal action and fines. And these are just some examples, it's a long list of consequences. Hopefully, some of the costs will be borne by insurers, but many will not. I often wonder why people can be so careless in managing their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.

Every injury or illness caused by work has a consequence for someone. Sometimes, the consequences will last a lifetime and sometimes the consequence will be loss of life. Think about that: how would you feel?

What would be the consequences for you, your family, your friends, in fact everyone involved or affected? Some businesses which, in the past, have hurt their employees, customers or neighbours have been severely impacted. Some have gone out of business.

I have worked in the insurance industry for many years and have seen the consequences of many accidents and much ill-health caused by workplace activities. I have felt real emotion, knowing the tragic consequences of workplace ill-health and accidents. Asbestos provides us with a good example of avoidable tragedy. Breathing asbestos fibres can have catastrophic consequences for an individual, a distressing death and immense stress for loved-ones. It is Guernsey's silent killer. It was used extensively in Guernsey, especially our buildings, before it was banned from further use in 1999.

We have good, strong law and an approved code of practice which should keep us all safe in Guernsey workplaces but sadly they are ignored by too many who put their own lives at risk as well as the lives of others.

Workplaces should all have an asbestos management plan which should record all places where asbestos is present in a building. This will help to avoid its inadvertent disturbance, which is especially relevant to employees, visitors and, importantly, contractors who can disturb it. If disturbed it can be lethal. The fibres are so small, they can't be seen and if you try to clear them up by taking a standard vacuum cleaner to them, they end up being scattered further in the cleaner's exhaust – they are too small to be

caught in the filter.

There are so many potential and actual causes of workplace injury and ill-health in Guernsey. Whether you work in an office, a shop, a manufacturing facility, a warehouse, hospitality, farming or fishing or the myriad of other businesses in our lovely island, you are at risk of something negatively impacting your life.

Every single business, charity, trading or voluntary organisation has the ability to hurt someone with serious consequences. I say this not to be a scaremonger, more to encourage you not to be complacent wherever you work and to encourage you to implement good practices.

Good practices make the working environment happier and healthier and ensure a trading concern achieves greater efficiency and effectiveness and, ultimately, success. All it needs is a caring, proactive, professional, sensible and knowledgeable approach. Gosha does not advocate a kid-gloves approach, we advocate common sense and a practical, proactive approach.

Here is a table of statistics of workplace caused accidents and ill-health reported to Guernsey's HSE. Perhaps ponder on what you can contribute to reducing the number of incidents we have in Guernsey each year and be aware that every sector in which work takes place in Guernsey can cause serious injury, ill-health or death. Luckily, it is within the power of everyone to avoid these consequences. It just needs us to be caring, knowledgeable, sensible and proactive in managing our wellbeing and that of anyone who could be affected by what we are doing.

◆ [www.gosha.org.gg](http://www.gosha.org.gg)

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States of Guernsey  
Health and Safety Executive

Reportable accidents at work - statistics 2009-2023

Agent (s) Involved	3.3.11	25.8.11	11.5.12	3.8.12	23.4.13	11.6.14	2.3.15	14.3.16	11.5.17	14.3.18	6.3.19	28.2.20					
	2009	2010	2011	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Machinery / equipment for lifting and conveying	18	15	22	22	19	15	4	10	7	12	8	18	C O V I D	14		4	
Portable power or hand tools	29	27	20	20	21	31	21	15	16	11	11	18		12	6	7	
Any vehicle or associated equipment / machinery	35	23	22	22	19	20	11	11	14	12	18	11		10	10	14	
Other machinery	14	8	6	5	7	8	12	5	7	10	3	7		7	1	5	
Process plant, pipework or bulk storage	4	4	2	2	1	1	3	3	1	2	0	9		8	13	4	
Any material, substance or product being handled used or stored	89	79	59	59	60	51	55	44	40	43	22	56		38	50	31	
Gas, vapor, dust, fume or oxygen deficient atmosphere	1	1	2	2	1	4	6	2	1	2	2	0		0	2	0	
Pathogen or infected material	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	26	2	2		3	7	10	
Live animal	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	0	1	4	2	2		1	0	2	
Moveable container or package of any kind	58	48	45	45	43	48	49	39	46	39	23	39		28	17	8	
Floor, ground, stairs or any working surface	61	64	46	46	62	54	80	43	58	48	44	87	1 9	14	39	80	
Building, engineering structure, excavation/underground working	12	5	3	3	3	1	3	4	5	6	2	4		3	2	9	
Ladder or scaffolding	24	14	17	17	12	26	21	14	12	15	11	8		3	1	3	
Construction formwork, shuttering and falsework	1	1	2	2	4	0	1	6	1	1	0	1		0	7	2	
Electricity supply cable, wiring apparatus or equipment	3	2	3	3	9	5	8	4	7	5	6	2		1	0	9	
Entertainment or sporting facilities or equipment	2	5	6	6	8	2	13	11	18	5	0	2		2	0	3	
Any other agent	76	101	76	77	67	67	104	101	71	95	85	111		46	42	21	
Unspecified	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	2	1	8	3		0	0	0	
TOTAL	430	399	333	334	340	336	396	317	307	337	247	380		190	197	212	